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PALESTINE PAPERS

THE
ECONOMIC
POSSIBILITIES
OF PALESTINE

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The Economic Possibilities of Palestine

At the present juncture it is particularly important that Jews should know something of their ancestral land, which, if they so desire, is to be theirs once more. For no one can become an intelligent adherent of the Zionist movement without being convinced that the advantages of establishing a Jewish national center in Palestine are real and indubitable economically as well as culturally.

Unfortunately, the seeker after information regarding Palestine is likely to be met by conflicting statements; for the literature on Palestine, both Gentile and Jewish, is so colored by sentiment as to be largely unreliable. According to one writer Palestine is a barren desert; another describes it in the Biblical locution as flowing with milk and honey.

In reality Palestine is neither of these things. Parts of it are unusually fertile, other parts, hopelessly barren to the unpractised eye of the layman, may be rendered arable by means of fertilizing and irrigating. Like the people who claim it as its heritage, the soil of Palestine has undergone centuries of ill-usage, and it will take much time and effort to restore it to its maximum of productivity. If, under a benevolent and farsighted government, a proper equilibrium is established between husbandry, industry, and commerce, Palestine can undoubtedly be made an eminently livable land, accommodating from four to five million inhabitants, each thriving under his own vine and fig tree.

The name Palestine does not convey a precise impression, for in the course of the history of the country its signification has varied. At present, however, it is generally assumed that the Jewish Palestine will have as its boundaries the Mediterranean to the west, a line extending from somewhere above Sidon through the Lebanons and Hermon to somewhere below Damascus to the north, the Haj Road or the Hejaz Railway (near the edge of the desert) to the east, and a line more or less coincident with the erstwhile Turco-Egyptian frontier to the south. According to this interpretation Palestine would extend from approximately $30^{\circ} 30'$ to $33^{\circ} 30'$ north latitude, and from 35° to $36^{\circ} 15'$ east longitude, with an area of about 13,000 square miles.

Physically Palestine is one with the rest of Syria, although separated from it by the Lebanons and Hermon. It consists of a limestone plateau, made up of four distinct longitudinal zones: the coastal plain, the western mountain range, the Jordan valley or depression (called *Ghor* in Arabic) and the eastern mountain range, or more correctly, the eastern plateau.

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The coast line of Syria, and particularly of Palestine, is undeviating. South of Beirut it does not offer any natural harbors. The promontory of Mt. Carmel forms a shelter which promises the possibility of development into a good harbor, as do also in a lesser degree Sidon, Atlit, Jaffa, Askalon, and Gaza, although considerable ingenuity and expense will be needed, for instance, in order to render harmless the reefs outside of Jaffa. Nothing but ruins remains of the historic harbors of Tyre, Arsuf, Caesarea, etc.

The coastal plain varies in width from 200 feet at the point where Mt. Carmel towers over the Bay of Acre, to 30 miles where, below Jaffa, it merges into the rolling hills of the Sh'felah.

The western mountain range, which extends from Lebanon down to the Sinai Peninsula, of limestone formation, is broken by the Plain of Esdraelon, which separates the mountains of Galilee from those of Samaria. Its highest point is above Hebron. This western range was the backbone of historic Palestine.

To the east the mountains descend rapidly into the Jordan valley, which is a continuation of the valleys formed by the Orontes and the Litany. The Jordan takes its source in the foothills of Hermon, and flows due south, for a distance of 110 miles as the bird flies in straight line, passing through the Lakes of Merom and Tiberias, and emptying into the Dead Sea. The Jordan valley, which is from 2 to 15 miles in breadth, sinks regularly and rapidly from the Lake of Merom on, until it reaches a depth of 1,292 feet below sea level on the coast of the Dead Sea. The Arabah valley, which extends from the southern extremity of the Dead Sea to Akaba, is in sort a prolongation of the Jordan valley.

As regards nomenclature Western Palestine is divided into Galilee,* extending from the Lebanons to the southern border of the Plain of Esdraelon; Samaria, lying between the Plain of Esdraelon and a line extending along the Aujeh to a point on the Jordan above Jericho; Judaea, extending south of Samaria as far as Beersheba, and the Negeb, or South Country, reaching to the Turco-Egyptian frontier.

The eastern mountain range or plateau, constituting the territory known as Transjordan, extends from the foothills of Hermon to the southern extremity of the Dead Sea, with an average elevation of 2,000 feet above sea level. It is traversed by three considerable streams running at right angles to the Jordan, the Yarmuk (Sheriat el Menadireh), the Jabbok (Nahr ez Zerka), and the Arnon (Wadi el Mojib) to the south, each of which has several tributaries.

The Yarmuk and the Jabbok divide Transjordan into three distinct parts: south of Mount Hermon as far as the Yarmuk lie Jaulan, Hauran, and Jebel ed Druz; between the Yarmuk and the Jabbok is Ajlun, and below the Jabbok Belka, the Gilead and Moab of old.

* Galilee is divided into Upper Galilee and Lower Galilee.

There are many extinct volcanoes throughout Jaulan and Hauran, and the basalt formation is covered with volcanic deposits.

The lakes of Palestine consist of the three mentioned above: the Lake of Merom (Lake Huleh), the Lake of Tiberias (Kinneret, Gennesaret, the Sea of Galilee), about 70 square miles in size, and the Dead Sea, about 400 square miles in size and as much as 1,300 feet deep in parts, famous for its saltness which is due to intense evaporation.

Western Palestine is poor in rivers, having but few transverse perennial streams, the Aujeh north of Jaffa, the Kishon near Haifa, etc., all flowing into the Mediterranean. Besides these there are a number of wadies (winter streams) flowing both east and west of the watershed. Transjordania has the three rivers mentioned above (see page 4); the Yarmuk and the Jabbok flow into the Jordan, the Arnon into the Dead Sea. The most important tributaries of the Yarmuk are the Allan and the Ehreir, both of them long and rapid streams. The rivers of Palestine are not navigable, being either too shallow or else too rapid in their course. The Jordan has both defects, possessing seventeen fords and falling about 436 metres between the Lake of Merom and the Dead Sea.

An important feature of Palestinian hydrography is the springs and fountains, which play throughout the year. These are to be found chiefly in the foothills of Mt. Hermon and in the Galilean and Samaritan mountains. In some cases the fountains form considerable pools, and even streams which run a short course. Besides, Palestine, which in parts seems arid on the surface, possesses a rich store of water in its depths which can easily be brought to the surface by means of wells. Along the coastal plain water is to be found at a depth corresponding to sea level. Pumping stations have been established in several of the Jewish colonies for irrigation purposes.

No other territory of the same size has so varied a climate as Palestine. This variety of climate has brought about not only an extraordinary diversity of animal and plant life, but to it is undoubtedly to be attributed the versatility of temperament which distinguishes the children of Israel. The glowing heat of the Dead Sea region, the milder warmth of the coastal plain, the sub-Alpine climate of Upper Galilee where the white head of Lebanon is always visible—all these are, according to American ideas, almost within commuting distance of one another. The mean annual temperature is: 75° in the Jordan valley, 69° in the coastal plain, 61° in the mountain regions. Throughout Palestine, and especially in Transjordania, there are tremendous variations of temperature from day to night.

Frost never appears in the Jordan valley, and rarely in the coastal plain, but it is frequent in the mountain ranges. Even as far south as Jerusalem there is a light snowfall from time to time.

There are two seasons in Palestine, the summer or dry season lasting from April through October, and the winter or rainy season. The autumn rains usually begin in the middle of November and last three or four weeks; the winter rains fall during January and Febru-

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ary, and the spring rains from the middle of March to the end of April. The rainfall, which varies greatly from one year to the other, ranges from about 400 mm. in the south of the coastal plain (Gaza) to 610 mm. in Haifa. It is greater in the mountain ranges (660 mm. in Jerusalem), but much smaller in the Jordan valley (200 mm. in Jericho). During the dry season a heavy dew falls in the coastal plain and the mountain districts.

The prevailing wind is from the southwest. In spring and fall the hot sirocco (Hamsin) blows from the Arabian desert.

The climatic conditions of Palestine, especially the rainfall, have been modified by the destruction of the forests, which have not only been hewn down for fuel by the natives, but left to the mercy of those enemies of underbrush and saplings, sheep and goats. (We know from history of the extensive oak forests which once covered the Plain of Sharon.) This absence of trees is also responsible for the inland march of the sand.

Palestine is emphatically a healthy land. What diseases are prevalent, malaria, trachoma, and epidemics of various kinds are the result of three causes, respectively: the marshes, which, as the Jewish settlers have proved, can be drained within a short time; ignorance of hygiene and malnutrition of the population; and the indiscriminate admission of pilgrims affected with cholera, the plague, etc.

The soil of Palestine is composed of disintegrated limestone, except in Northern Transjordan, where the basalt formation is covered by a thick layer of disintegrated lava of unusual fertility. In Western Palestine the soil is deep on the coastal plain, in the Jordan valley, and in the transverse valleys, but shallow in the mountain districts (25-50 cm.), as it is washed down the slopes by the heavy rains. The soil of the mountain districts is coarse-grained and porous, that of the plains either rich in clay and not porous, or else sandy. The sand from the coast is incessantly blown inland by the west wind, and forms dunes which are partly responsible for the marshes along the coastal plain. (The dunes block the winter streams in their seaward course.)

Throughout history Palestine has been famous for its olives, vines, and wheat. There are olive trees all over the land, for the olive tree thrives in shallow soil. Vines have been grown with particular success in the neighborhood of Jaffa and in the Plain of Sharon. The other fruit trees, especially almond, apricot, etc., yield satisfactory crops. The planters make from 10 to 11 per cent. on their invested capital when the trees reach their period of full productivity (six years for vines, seven to nine years for oranges, almonds, or apricots, and twelve years for olives). The orange plantations near the coast thrive despite the stratum of loose sand through which their roots must penetrate in order to reach the loam beneath. Artificial irrigation, is, of course, necessary.

It has already been stated that Palestine, with the exception of Gilead, has been practically denuded of trees. Various kinds of fir trees are to be found in small quantities in the north, and oaks (a

rather stunted variety), nut trees, carob trees, palms, etc., throughout Western Palestine. In recent years the Jewish colonists have planted eucalyptus trees in the marshes for drainage purposes, and several considerable forests have grown up, notably in Hudeirah (Samaria). There is a far greater variety of trees in Transjordan.

Cereals and legumes are grown throughout the country, especially wheat, barley, sesame, durrha, lentils, clover, alfalfa, etc. Hauran, one of the famous granaries of the Roman Empire, supplies wheat to Damascus, Beirut, the Lebanon district, sections of Palestine, and to foreign parts. Fruits and vegetables of all kinds flourish on the coastal plain and in the transverse valleys. The melons and cucumbers are especially fine.

Animal husbandry has not been practised to any extent in Western Palestine. Asses, horses and camels are used for transportation purposes. The wandering Arab tribes of Transjordan have large herds of camels, horses, cows, sheep, goats, etc., and they bring their live-stock, as well as such products as hides, wool, cheese, etc., to the Syrian markets. The fellaheen of Western Palestine keep sheep and goats in preference to cattle. Poultry is not very common. Apiculture has been engaged in by the colonists. There are many varieties of fish in the Lakes of Merom and Tiberias, and some moderately good salt-water fish along the coast. It should be said, too, that Palestine is extremely rich in game.

The industry and commerce of Palestine are a direct outgrowth of its agriculture, except, of course, for that branch of its commerce which consists in importing the requirements not produced in the country, such as certain comestibles, clothing, manufactured articles, timber, coal, petroleum, machinery, etc. The production of olive and sesame oil and soap, and of wine in the Jewish colonies of Rishon l'Zion and Zichron Jacob constitute the main branches of industry, outside of such minor industries as lime-burning, weaving, wood-carving, pottery, etc. Oranges, grown by the Jewish and Arab planters in the vicinity of Jaffa, were (before the war) exported in considerable quantities, as well as almonds, grain, and perishable fruits and vegetables (to Egypt). The Jewish vintners and orange planters are organized into co-operative associations which have been extremely successful in finding a market for their wares.†

It must not be supposed that the poverty of this enumeration is due to the inability of the land to produce. Palestine has not been given a chance. The native population‡ has been content to live as its fathers have lived for times immemorial, and the Turkish Government has been content to let the lethargic fellah be exploited by

† The annual orange output amounts to 600,000 to 700,000 cases (weighing 35 kilograms each), with a total value of about 2,000,000 francs. The wine (including brandies, liqueurs, etc.) exported annually amounts to about 40,000 hectoliters.

‡ In 1914 the population of Palestine consisted of about 500,000 Moslems, 100,000 Jews, and 100,000 Christians (including Christian Syrians, Europeans, etc.). Of the Syrians 130,000 were town dwellers, whereas 370,000 were husbandmen, living in about 1,500 villages. Of the 100,000 Jews about 50,000 lived in Jerusalem, 30,000 in the other cities, and 15,000 in 48 agricultural settlements. The Christians lived for the most part in the cities and towns (Jerusalem, Haifa, Jaffa, Bethlehem, Nazareth, etc.), and in the German agricultural settlements.

the land-owner and the tax-collector. The Jewish colonists who have settled in the country within the last forty years owe their survival to remarkable determination and perseverance, for they have been handicapped by poverty, a complete ignorance of agricultural methods, and again the malevolent attitude of the Turkish officials. Perhaps the only people who have been able to demonstrate to what degree Palestine may be developed agriculturally are the German Templars, who, establishing themselves in several settlements around Jaffa and Haifa, have engaged in diversified farming, with special emphasis on orange and vine cultivation and dairying.

Several abortive enterprises of the Jewish colonists point the way for the future. The colonists of Rosh Pinah (under the administration of Baron Edmond de Rothschild) planted tobacco, but the government monopoly rendered their efforts unprofitable; they raised mulberry bushes, but were unable to make the silk-worm industry pay on so small a scale; a perfume factory had to be closed down for similar reasons.

Another cause for the retarded development of the country was the lack of transportation facilities, which made it useless to produce perishable foodstuffs anywhere but in the immediate vicinity of the cities, and which was fatally prejudicial to the growth of industry. Up to the period of the war Palestine had few roads and fewer railroads. The roads were so neglected as to render transportation by wagon impossible. An exception to this rule was formed by the roads connecting the Jewish colonies near Jaffa.

Thanks to military activities it seems that the country has now been covered by a network of excellent roads, which lend themselves to wagon and motor traffic. Similarly the railroad system, which up to 1914 consisted of:

1. The Jaffa-Jerusalem line, built by a French company in 1892;
2. The parts of the Hejaz line (the railway built for the Moslem pilgrims, connecting Damascus with Medina and Mecca) falling within Palestine, namely: Damascus-Deraa-Maan, Haifa-Deraa-Bosrah, Haifa-Acre, Haifa-Afulah (Afulah being an Arabian village adjoining the Jewish colony Merhaviah in the Plain of Esdraelon), has been greatly amplified both by the Turkish (under German tutelage) and the British military forces. In 1916 the Turks had extended the Western Palestinian line from Afulah to Jenin and Massadiyah, and from the latter to Lydda and Nablus (Shechem). Further south Wadi Serar had been connected up with Beersheba and Hafir. We know that the British have built a railroad between Port Said and Jaffa, which is probably to have ramifications to the east. It is to be assumed that when the war is over the problem of communication by road and rail will be solved. As far as steamship traffic is concerned, before the war the Syrian ports, especially Alexandretta and Beirut (and in a smaller measure Jaffa) were visited by a large number of vessels, from other parts of Turkey, from Russia, Greece, Austria, Italy, France, Germany, England, Egypt, India, etc.

Such, then, in brief, are the resources, or rather, the latent pos-

sibilities of Palestine, which it behooves us to envisage neither from the point of view of the philanthropist nor of the individual settler. but, in so far as it lies in our power, as economists and statesmen.

Both the past and the present convince us that Palestine must of necessity be an agricultural country. But husbandry is no longer the uninspired drudgery of the illiterate. Husbandry is both a science and a business, and Palestinian farmers will have to be both scientists and business-men if they want to make the most of what the land has to offer. It would seem that Lower Galilee, Samaria, and the upper part of Judaea, with their numerous cities and towns, should be devoted to intensive agriculture, that is to say, diversified farming, special emphasis being laid on plantations (oranges, almonds, olives, etc.), cereal cultivation, etc., in accordance with the climate and the quality of the soil. The Judaeian hills can be converted into vineyards and olive plantations by a system of terracing such as was used in ancient times, which prevents the soil from being washed down into the valleys. Upper Galilee offers excellent corn and pasture land. The Jordan valley, with its sub-tropical climate, can be devoted to the cultivation of tobacco, sugar cane, bananas, etc. The marshes around the Lake of Merom are eminently suitable for rice growing. Up to half a century ago cotton was raised along the coastal plain. Southern Judaea and the Negeb are by no means to be despised, for their sterility is only apparent. The castor oil bush, the cultivation of which is particularly remunerative, as it requires little care and reaches its period of productivity within two or three years, has been found to thrive in those districts, as have certain kinds of succulent cacti, palms, and other trees which can be used for timber.

The application of modern irrigation methods (canalization, etc.) will, of course, be indispensable to the development of the country.

Mention has already been made of the urgent need for afforestation. Steps will also have to be taken to prevent the encroachments of the sand dunes.

So much for Western Palestine. It is, however, on Transjordan that we should focus our attention. Transjordan offers vast opportunities for agricultural and industrial enterprise, notably for grain cultivation and cattle farming. The wheat fields of Hauran are no more famous than the pastures of Jaulan and Belka. Moreover, motive force for mills and factories is not wanting. The Yarmuk and its tributaries can, according to a German engineering expert, supply electricity for the whole of the country. There will be no need of exporting wool to English manufacturing centers. The Manchester and Leeds of Palestine will undoubtedly be located over Jordan, close upon the ruins of the ancient towns of the Decapolis. Again, the herbs of Gilead were famous in olden times, and there is no reason why they should not take their place in Palestinian exports. Medicinal plants are a considerable item in the exports of Northern Syria and Arabia.

It is easy to see what industries will grow from the branches of husbandry indicated above: milling, weaving, tanning, the production

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of wine, oil, soap, perfumes, castor oil, cigarette-making, canning, desiccating, possibly silk-weaving, etc. There is an opportunity for fish-smoking both on the coast and on the banks of the Lake of Tiberias.

The mineral resources of Palestine have not yet been thoroughly investigated, but it does not seem that there is much to hope for in the way of coal, iron, or precious metals. The Dead Sea is rich in asphalt (comp. its ancient name Asphaltitis) and contains various minerals in solution. Since the outbreak of the war the surrounding country has been using the salt prepared from its waters. Several years ago an American concern invested in a tract of land along its shores and was about to drill oil wells when the war put an end to its activities. The mineral springs of Tiberias and Callirrhoe will serve the country in a different capacity.

The commerce of Palestine will not be limited to the export of its products and the import of its requirements. Thanks to its situation Palestine is, as has so often been said, the connecting link between three continents. When the harbor of Akaba is constructed to receive large steamers and is linked up with Maan by rail, Palestine will be directly connected with India and the Far East. Besides Palestine is, together with the rest of Syria, the sea front of a vast hinterland for the raw products of which it can exchange domestic and foreign wares. It is significant that in recent years there has been a strengthening of commercial relations between Syria and India. No one can predict the extent of Palestine's commercial future without seeming to indulge in fantastic exaggerations.

But Palestine has other assets than its agricultural and commercial possibilities. The holy places will continue to attract multitudes of tourists of all nationalities and denominations, especially when traveling is made comfortable and adequate hotel accommodations are provided. Tourists are a not inconsiderable source of wealth to a country, and their presence will make for the introduction of numerous industries. Besides the holy places, Palestine offers an attraction in its mineral springs, Tiberias and Callirrhoe, both places famous since antiquity. The climate of the Jordan valley is excellent for convalescents.

Throughout this exposition no reference has been made to the population of Palestine, either present or future. As a matter of fact the question of the population can be treated only by surmises. We do not know how many of the 500,000 Syrians of ante-bellum days have survived, nor what their political status will be in the future. It is certain, however, that the Syrians will have their place both literally and figuratively in the Palestinian State, and that they will have equal opportunities with their Jewish neighbors.

As for the Jewish population, one cannot but be convinced that in the course of time it will make the most of the resources of the land regained after so long and bitter a struggle, so that its well-being and prosperity shall be of benefit alike to itself and the other nations.

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